




## A Sign of the Times

Boat landings and other access points will be posted to remind boaters and anglers of the precautionary measures that must be taken to help minimize the spread of the VHS virus.

**VHS ALERT**  
**BOATERS & ANGLERS**  
Do not move water and live fish (including bait fish) from this water.



Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS) virus is affecting fish species in Wisconsin. The virus is not a threat to people who want to eat their catch. YOU can help control the spread of this virus and other invasive species:

- ⚠️ **Drain all water from your boat and trailer, containers, and fishing equipment including bait buckets and coolers.**
- ⚠️ **Do not move live fish, including unused minnows, from these waters. Ice your catch and use or dispose of your leftover minnows in a lawful manner.**
- ⚠️ **Do not use minnows unless they were purchased from a licensed Wisconsin bait dealer or you caught them from the water you are fishing.**
- ⚠️ **Remove all visible plants, animals, and mud from your boat and trailer.**

If you witness a large number of dead or dying fish, please contact your local DNR office or call the DNR Hotline at 1-800-TIP-WDNR. For more information on the VHS virus in Wisconsin, visit: <http://dnr.wi.gov/fish/pages/vhs.html>

Photo credit: Scott Trautner (DSC), Stevie Winkler (Bait Shop), Lanning (Bait Shop) and Dr. Paul Baskett (Cornell, Ithaca NY)

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For specific regulations and additional information on the VHS virus visit:

**fishingwisconsin.org**

Bureau of Fisheries Management  
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# MINNOWS AS BAIT



What Wisconsin anglers need to know to prevent spreading the VHS fish virus



## Help Keep Wisconsin Fish Healthy

A new fish virus that caused large fish kills in several eastern Great Lakes states in 2005 and 2006 was discovered in Lake Michigan and Lake Winnebago in May 2007. The virus may also be present in Lake Superior and the Mississippi River.



Signs of VHS virus in fish include bloody spots on the skin and in the muscle and tissues, pale or swollen internal organs, and swollen eyes.

The Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia virus, or VHSV, is not a threat to people who handle fish or want to eat their catch. However, it can spread easily to healthy fish that eat infected fish or absorb water carrying the virus.

Walleye, musky, bluegill, and drum are among the most susceptible to VHS. To keep them healthy and prevent this deadly fish disease from spreading, rules prohibit boaters and anglers from moving water and live fish, including minnows, away from a waterbody. The rules seek to reduce the risk that water carrying VHS, or an infected minnow or other fish, is accidentally released into a new lake or river.

Infected fishes – whether they were infected with VHS before leaving the bait shop or picked it up while sitting in a bait bucket refreshed with water from that lake -- are the most likely pathway for VHS to get introduced to new waters. Contamination of ice augers, small amounts of water left in a boat after it's drained, animals moving from water to water -- all of these present a much lower risk of spreading the disease.

**Please do your part to protect Wisconsin's great fishing by following these new rules.**

## Rules ban moving live fish, water

New statewide emergency regulations for boaters and anglers went into effect in November 2007 to prevent them from accidentally spreading VHS to new lakes or rivers.

Under the statewide rules you:

- ⚠️ May not leave the bank or shore of any water with any live fish or live fish eggs, including leftover minnows. There are limited exceptions to the rule for commercial wild bait harvest.
- ⚠️ Must drain all water from bilges, ballast, live wells, bait buckets and other containers before you leave the bank or shore of any water.
- ⚠️ May not use or possess live fish or live fish eggs as bait if bought outside Wisconsin. Exceptions: if bait will be used on the Mississippi River "between the tracks" and if the bait was imported in compliance with state import rules.
- ⚠️ May not use dead fish, fish eggs, or fish parts for bait. Exceptions: if you are fishing in the same water where the bait was collected; if it was preserved by a method that does not require refrigeration or freezing, or if you are fishing in Lake Michigan or Green Bay or there connected waters upstream to the first dam or other obstruction impassible to fish.
- ⚠️ May not transport by land into Wisconsin any water in boats, boat trailers, boating equipment or fishing equipment, including water in any bilge, ballast tank, bait container or live well.

WISCONSIN ANGLERS

Some of you won't be affected by the rules concerning live or dead minnows used as bait. You fish with artificial lures, nightcrawlers or other baits not covered by these new rules. You may buy only enough minnows to use every day, so you don't have any leftovers, or you may live along a waterbody, or be staying at a resort along one, and can legally keep your minnows in a bait container attached to a dock or shore as long as it is tagged with your name and address when you are not using it.

This brochure is for those anglers who usually fish with large quantities of minnows, dead fish or fish eggs as bait. Here are answers to some of the most common questions about the new rules.

**Why can't I reuse leftover minnows?** Reusing minnows is a concern because most anglers change or add water to their minnows from the lake they are fishing. Your minnows could pick up VHS while in that water. We can't apply the rule only to waterbodies where VHS has been found through testing because we have had the time, money, and opportunity to test only a fraction of Wisconsin's 15,000 inland lakes.

**OK, so why can't I reuse leftover minnows on the same lake?** We agree that most people want to do the right thing and would willingly use leftover



minnows on the same lake. The problem with allowing reuse, however, is that it will be impossible for wardens to distinguish leftover minnows brought back to the same lake from any others. There must be a simple and legally enforceable way for wardens to stop those few anglers who are not going to do the right thing and could potentially spread VHS. We've tried to come up with other options, but not allowing live minnows to leave the water remains the best option so far.

**The rules say it's illegal to transport live fish away from a waterbody? When is a person considered to be transporting a fish?** While fishing the same waterbody, you can move your boat to a new location, or walk along the shore to a new location, with live fish or live fish eggs in your bait bucket or live well. Once you leave that waterbody, however, you must drain all water including containers carrying fish or bait before you leave the bank or shore and make no attempt to revive the fish later.

**What if some of my bait minnows die in my minnow bucket or livewell. Can I still use them?** Yes. If the fish were alive when you started fishing but died in your bait container, you can continue using them on that same water until the end of the day. The dead minnows cannot be used on any other waters unless you preserve them first using a method that does not require refrigeration or freezing.

**If I must drain all the water from my boat live wells and bait containers, what am I supposed to do with my leftover minnows?** Minnows can spread the VHS virus so you may not keep them alive after you leave the water. Drain all water from the minnows and dispose of them at a cleaning station or trash receptacle, if available. Otherwise, take them home and dispose of them as you would the remains of any fish you keep and clean. You may also preserve them for future use as dead bait.

**Do I have to drain the water from my bait bucket if it is not an attached part of the boat?** Yes. The law requires that you drain the water from all equipment in the boat. This requirement aims to ensure that no water from potentially VHS-infected lakes or rivers has gotten into your boat, trailer, or other equipment and gets transported elsewhere.

**Can I collect my own minnows without a permit?** Yes, you can collect minnows for personal use as long as you use them only on the water you collected them from. You'll need to drain the water



Chemically preserved minnows are an option for anglers who fish dead bait

from the container and properly dispose of the minnows after you're done fishing.

**Can I use dead minnows for bait (frozen smelt)?** Dead minnows or other fish cannot be used for bait unless they were collected from the water you are fishing or have been preserved in a manner that does not require refrigeration or freezing.

**Are minnows that are brought onto the ice still considered on the lake and do they have to be killed before I leave the shore?** Yes, when you bring minnows to the shore, whether the water is open or frozen, those minnows may not be taken away live.

**Can I leave the bulk of my minnows in my vehicle at the landing and take a few minnows out on the lake at a time so I will not have to kill all of them at the end of the day?** Yes. Any minnows that you do not bring to the water, its shores or banks, can be taken home at the end of the day and used elsewhere. For instance, you can leave a cooler of minnows in your vehicle and return to the vehicle to stock up on minnows as you run out. A key point to remember is that you must remove the container holding the minnows from the vehicle before using that vehicle to launch or load your boat so the fish will never be possessed on the bank or shore of the water.

**Can I leave minnows in a bait bucket or live box in the lake for use at a later date?** Yes, as long as the container is clearly and legibly marked with your name and address. Containers may not be left on or attached to public property and you must have permission before attaching to any private property.

**Can I leave unused bait in a container under the ice of my ice shanty for use next time on the same lake?** Yes, you may submerge a container holding live minnows under your ice shanty as long as you have a rope attached to the container and ice shanty or have some other way to retrieve the container. Keep in mind, fishing holes cut in the ice can't be larger than 12 inches in diameter.

**Is it ok to transport dead fish that have eggs inside of them?** Yes, as long as the eggs are not removed later and fertilized for the purpose of producing fish.

**Are there any restriction on the use of other types of live bait, such as worms, leeches, insects or their larva?** Other types of live baits such as worms, leeches, insects, and larvae, are generally still legal to use. However, under the current rules, all water is required to be drained from all equipment and containers used for fishing. This includes water in containers that may contain leeches or aquatic insects. Once away from the waterbody, an angler could place the leeches or aquatic insects back into fresh water, such as tap water, to try to revive or keep the leeches or insects alive for future use.

**Do I have to drain the water from my drinking water containers and coolers, including melted ice in coolers used to keep fish or food and beverages cold?** This rule does not apply to beverage containers, including bottled drinking water. Melted ice in coolers used to keep dead fish fresh also needs to be drained, but ice that has not yet melted may be kept to keep your fish, food, or beverages cool.

**Besides draining the water from my boat, trailer, motor, bilge, live wells, bait containers, etc., what else can I do to make sure I do not transport this disease to other waters?** The VHS virus can survive in water for up to 2 weeks. You can sanitize your boat, trailer or equipment by washing it with a mixture of 1/2 cup of household bleach per 5 gallons of water. Completely drying your boat and trailer will also reduce the risk of infecting other waters.